



MENU LABELLING IN ONTARIO RESTAURANTS:

Key Messages by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health

OSNPPH's position paper entitled *Serving Up Nutrition Information in Ontario Restaurants* synthesizes the evidence and makes recommendations for menu labelling legislation for Ontario (Mah, 2013).

OSNPPH supports menu labelling legislation requiring the prominent display of calorie and sodium content of food items at the point of sale in restaurants in Ontario, as an important contribution to healthy and supportive food environments for Ontarians.

Description of Menu Labelling

- Menu labelling is a practical and effective population-wide means to contribute to chronic disease prevention.
- Menu labelling takes the principles of existing labelling required for packaged foods and applies this to restaurants and other food establishments by making visible key nutrition information on menus, menu boards, or individual food item tags.
- Menu labelling supports consumers to be better informed, at or before the point of purchase, to make healthier food and beverage choices when eating out.

Rationale for Menu Labelling

- People may face many barriers to healthy eating when eating out, including high-calorie food and beverage items and a lack of information about nutrition content of choices.
- Diners frequently underestimate calorie content by about 30%, and an average meal item in a sit-down restaurant contains one and a half times the recommended daily sodium level for adults.
- Menu labelling supports transparency and peoples' right to know.
- Menu labelling helps people to make healthier food choices when eating out and may also lead to healthier choices being offered at restaurants and other food establishments.

Support for Menu Labelling Legislation

- Menu labelling has been receiving strong support, with about three-quarters of Canadians regarding it as important, as well as numerous health organizations and experts recommending it as a strategy to create healthier eating out environments.



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Menu Labelling Specifics

- **Menu labelling should be required through legislation.**

Voluntary approaches to menu labelling have fallen short of population health goals because they do not require that key nutrition information be put right on the menu and information is not provided clearly and consistently. Voluntary menu labelling also does not provide a level playing field for all restaurants and other food establishments.

- **Display clear and unbiased information about product content.**

Clear and unbiased nutrition information about food and beverage products supports diners in making informed food choices that are right for themselves and their families. Specific nutrient content information should be displayed (i.e. calorie and sodium content), not a warning label or flags. The use of flags could be perceived as a claim about the nutrition content in the menu item. The actual amount of the nutrient on the label, is more direct and clear and allows the consumer to make an unbiased decision.

- **Calorie and sodium content information should be displayed.**

There is good evidence that displaying calorie content of foods through menu labelling could have important long-term effects on reducing obesity rates. In addition, the typically high sodium content of restaurant foods and the associated health risks of excessive sodium intake, require that sodium information be more readily available.

- **Calorie and sodium information should be displayed clearly and prominently where people can readily see it when ordering food.**

Displaying nutrition information on printed menus, menu boards, drive-through menus, etc. so that it can be readily seen and easily read supports informed decision-making at times when food and beverage choices are being made.

- **Menus and menu boards should also include reference values for calories and sodium.**

Reference values put nutrient amounts in the context of daily needs and support consumers' use of nutrition information.

Reference:

Mah L. Catherine L. 2013. *Serving up Nutrition Information in Ontario Restaurants: A Position Paper*. Prepared by Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health Menu Labelling Working Group http://www.osnpnh.on.ca/resources/Menu_Labelling_Position_Paper_FINAL_revision.pdf.